



ANTHROPOLOGICAL NOTES.

BY RICHD. HELMS.

(Communicated by the Secretary.)

(Plates XXIX.-XXX.)

INTRODUCTORY REMARKS.

The following notes are to a great extent compiled from communications I have from time to time received from old settlers who in their early days frequently came in contact with the Aborigines inhabiting the neighbourhood of their settlements, and who remember the habits and customs of these extinct or decaying tribes. Special thanks I owe to Mr. John Barry, Senr., who settled on the Mowamba River more than forty years ago, and from whose store of vivid recollections I have drawn a great many of the facts now set down.

It is to be regretted that the narratives are but fragmentary, yet I consider them sufficiently interesting to be recorded, more especially on account of the comparisons that may be drawn between the manners described and those of other Australian tribes.

I do not intend to dilate upon this subject, but merely wish to remark that, viewing the manners and customs described from a general aspect, it becomes apparent that they are very similar, and that they originated in common with those of the great bulk of the other Australian aboriginal tribes. The tribes here spoken of differed from most of their compatriots in the neglect of some widespread customs rather than in the practice of peculiar rites. I am alluding to the rites of circumcision and of the mika operation, neither of which were practised by the tribes that lived in the

south-western parts of New South Wales or the north-eastern of Victoria.

THE OMEO BLACKS.

This tribe, once numbering upwards of 140 to 150 souls, is now extinct. They can still be remembered by some of the old settlers, who not much more than 30 years ago saw them a vigorous tribe in its fullest expansion. It is a lamentable fact that through contact with Europeans within the time of one generation, whole tribes of considerable numbers have entirely vanished. This does not only apply to the tribe in question, but is equally applicable to their neighbours, whether friends or foes. The Monaro tribe, for instance, is also nearly extinct, and of their once numerous hordes only two or three half-civilised, demoralised individuals remain. Between 30 and 40 years ago some of the old settlers have seen on special occasions as many as 500 to 700 aborigines of all ages and sexes assembled together, but their grandchildren will know the blacks only from hearsay and by what remains of their less perishable implements of war, *i.e.*, a few stone hatchets that may occasionally be turned up during ploughing, or otherwise discovered.

The Omeo Tribe occupied the north-western corner of Victoria, and were friendly with the Buffalo Tribe (Ovens district) on their side of the Murray, and on the other side of the river with the Monaro and Queanbeyan Tribes. Probably the customs of these four tribes were identical, because they lived in frequent intercourse and combined against their common enemies. These were the Braidwood, the Twofold Bay, the Gippsland Tribes, and those living near the borders of the Murray from below Albury.

A nearly constant feud was waged between these tribes, and bloody contests frequently occurred. The mode of attack as a rule was as follows:—After watching the enemy during the day-time, and spying out their camping place, a couple of warriors would stealthily sneak round it at night to reconnoitre the position and its surroundings. If not detected, a raid would be made upon it at the dawn of day by the whole of the attacking party, who generally yelled loudly and made a fearful noise when close

to the camp. The surprise mostly caused a stampede amongst the suddenly aroused sleepers, and those who did not escape by immediate flight, whether young or old, would be speared or knocked down with nulla nullas. After burning the spears and other war implements that were left behind, the attacking party returned as quickly as possible to their own district, probably to meet with a similar fate at some future time when the enemy had rallied and was reinforced.

The oldest man of the tribe was recognised as a kind of chief, but whenever an attack on some enemy was planned, the ablest warrior as a rule was chosen to lead, and his advice then received the endorsement of the old men.

Personal disputes were also not infrequent, and were generally settled by a fight, either with spears or clubs. In each case the shield served for warding off the spears or the blows of the nulla. Fighting with stone tomahawks was not permitted in these duels, and was suppressed if in the heat of the combat the assailants should resort to these murderous weapons. In fact most of their fights, if single combats, were regulated by the onlookers, who frequently interfered when one of the parties was seen to get weak and it was noticed that he was unable to ward off the blows with the necessary dexterity. Some of their fights were regulated so that the combatants alternately hit the "hielaman" held by the opponents with the left hand above the head till the arm would gradually get weak and sink so that the nulla would fall on the head instead of the shield. The first hit on the head would end the fight as a rule, and frequently—if, for instance, one of the duellists was a much older man than the other—the fight might probably be stopped just before the club fell upon the skull, and the combat declared satisfactorily finished.

During the quarrel the opponents used to gather their beards in the mouth, which, together with the grimaces they assumed, gave them a ferocious expression.

They recognised the tribal rights to certain grounds, but the boundaries were not always particularly respected, as it happened frequently that they were overstepped during hunting excursions.

When about to convey important communications to another tribe, such as to summon the warriors for a hostile invasion of the territory of their common enemies, or for a friendly meeting with the object of performing rites of a ceremonial nature, &c., two men were generally sent. Whilst the one slept the other kept watch to avoid being surprised by enemies during the journey, or being taken and slain as such whilst asleep by some friendly natives in mistake.

When on the war-path, as well as during the performance of their rites of initiation and at their dances and corrobories, they liked to appear ornamented, which they accomplished by painting the fronts of their bodies. The colours used were white, red, and black. For the first they used pipeclay, for the second raddle, and for the black charred seedstalks of the grasstree. The powdered charcoal they mixed with grease, forming a pigment that would stick on for months.

They had two distinct ceremonies to raise the male members of the tribe from childhood to manhood.

At about the age of from 14 to 16 years the young man was made "Kurrungong," which was done by knocking out one of his upper central incisors. This removed him from the care of his mother and the influence of the women, and so to say raised him from boyhood to the state of youth.

At the age of 18 or 20, that is when his beard had started to develop properly, he was made "Wahu." To initiate him into this state, the following ceremony was performed by the men, the women being excluded:—All the hair of the head was singed off close to the skull by means of some burning fibrous bark. This was a somewhat slow procedure, and had to be done very gradually, the hair being lit continually and blown out before it flared up too much. Whilst the young man submitted to this in silence, the onlookers and operators would carry on a lively conversation or some chanting. When all the hair had been removed and the singing was over, three of the old men came running towards the newly initiated with green boughs in their hands, which they waved in succession several times over his head.

After this the men would run some distance away and returning swing the boughs with a swishing sound in a certain direction, mentioning at the same time the name of the district towards which they were pointing. This was repeated three times for each of the various directions they might point to. Each name mentioned was preceded by the emphasised exclamation of "Wau-Wau!" For instance, "Wau-Wau! Tumut;" "Wau-Wau! Queanbeyan," &c., &c., which was followed at times by an exhortation or malediction. This indicated that the Wahu may go to these districts as a friend and may have luck, or on the other hand that in some of these directions lived the tribes with whom he would have to carry on the hereditary feuds, for from henceforth he was to be considered as being raised to the position of a warrior in his own tribe.

As soon as the initiation was completed, the women were again admitted to the presence of the men, and dancing and corrobories were held during the evening for the amusement of all, and more particularly for the benefit of the visitors, of whom there were generally a number present on these occasions.

Manhood having now been conferred upon the newly initiated, the respect due to a man (which meant a warrior in case of need and not a mere huntsman as hitherto) was shown him, and in commemoration of the event a special privilege was accorded to him. This consisted in the permission being given to the newly made Wahu to choose any woman of the tribe he liked, his blood relations excepted, and cohabit with her for the night. But such a privilege was extended to him for that night only. At any other time sexual intercourse was regarded as adultery or fornication, as the case might be, the punishment for which was a severe beating with waddies, sometimes inflicted with sufficient severity to cause death.

They had no special marriage ceremonies, but when a woman was to be given to a man to cohabit with him for the first time, her female relations and the other women of the tribe would build a "gunyah" of boughs, dense enough to prevent being overlooked,

and place the woman therein to wait the arrival of her affianced man.

A girl was frequently betrothed to someone by the parents at her birth, and was handed over to her affianced man when she arrived at puberty.

Polygamy was customary and was not restricted; the more wives a man had, the richer he was considered.* As a rule the women were a free gift, but at times a remuneration had to be offered in the shape of weapons or other useful utensils. The man who had a number of sisters whom he might promise, or over whom he possessed some influence through his parents, stood the best chance of having many wives.

It was not considered adultery for a brother to have sexual intercourse with the wife of a brother, and it would frequently occur that one brother would lend a wife to another who had none of his own. During the absence from the district (when, for instance, on a visit to a friendly tribe) the wife or wives were left in charge of a brother who assumed the part of husband for the time being. If the absentee had no brother, this duty would fall upon the nearest relative. The husbands of two sisters were considered to be brothers.

Marriage between blood relations was strictly forbidden. They firmly believed that if closely related people had carnal connection, both offenders would be bitten by "jidjigongs" (snakes); this was a constant dread to them, as it might not take place till after many years.

The same punishment was also supposed to follow looking at or speaking to mothers-in-law, which was forbidden before as well as after marriage.

Young people were strictly forbidden to indulge in carnal intercourse. If detected at such an offence, they would receive a severe beating from the other members of the tribe. In case a

* My informant (Mr. Barry) told me that he had known some men to have as many as five wives.

woman of mature age should have clandestine connection with a much younger man than herself, she was sometimes killed.

Whenever adultery was discovered, the punishment was in most cases death. The woman's friends as a rule attacked the offending man, and the man's friends killed the woman. Although this was the generally adopted custom and law, it was often the cause of a general intertribal fight and the origin of a prolonged family feud.

A man who received a girl in promise endeavoured to obtain a lock of her hair, which he would keep, and if she refused him afterwards he would sometimes wrap an eagle-hawk's feather in the hair and throw the tuft in some waterhole. As the hair decomposed, the woman would sicken and ultimately die.

Up to about the fourth year a child got almost anything it liked to eat, but at a later age it was forbidden certain things. They were made to believe that if anyone ate of forbidden food he or she would sooner or later be killed by lightning. This superstition was so firmly ingrafted into them that some would endure severe starvation rather than partake of forbidden food. From some individuals the restriction of eating certain animals was removed earlier than from others, but it seems that the flesh of an emu was never allowed to be eaten till some time after the arrival at the age of manhood. When this time had arrived, the man who was for the first time to eat of this specially reserved dish would sit down between two fires and have the emu placed in front of him. He could then eat as much as he liked, but was not allowed to go to sleep when he was satisfied, and was forcibly kept awake the whole night whenever he became drowsy.

They cooked their food either on the fire, or when they had a great deal of it and were not in a hurry, in a kind of oven in the ground. For this purpose they dug a suitable hole and filled the bottom of it with stones over which a fire was lighted. As soon as the stones had been well heated, the fire and ashes were removed and the game was placed upon the stones. This was covered with bark and green bushes over which the hot ashes were heaped, and the whole left undisturbed till the meat was cooked.

The food supply was as a rule abundant in the district during favourable seasons. It consisted of all kinds of game, birds and birds' eggs, reptiles, fishes, and insects. Amongst the first the opossum furnished probably the most frequent meal, because it occurred very abundantly; and amongst the insects the "Bugong"* supplied numbers of the natives with a fattening diet for months. How this unique and remarkable food supply, found always on the highest mountains, was procured deserves a detailed description:—As early as October, as soon as the snow had melted on the lower ranges, small parties of natives would start during fine weather for some of the frost-riven rocks and procure "Bugongs" for food. A great gathering usually took place about Christmas on the highest ranges, when sometimes from 500 to 700 aborigines belonging to different friendly tribes would assemble almost solely for the purpose of feasting upon roasted moths. Sometimes these natives had to come great distances to enjoy this food, which was not only much appreciated by them but must have been very nutritious, because their condition was generally improved by it, and when they returned from the mountains their skins looked glossy and most of them were quite fat. Their method of catching the insects was both simple and effective. With a burning or smouldering bush in the hand the rents in the rocks were entered as far as possible, when the heat and smoke would stifle the thickly congregated moths, that occupied nearly every crack, and make them tumble to the bottom of the cleft. Here an outstretched kangaroo skin or a fine net made of kurrajong fibre would receive most of the stupefied and half-singed insects, which were then roasted on hot ashes. This process required some care and attention in order to prevent the bodies of the moths getting scorched, and therefore the ashes required to be not too hot and had to be free from large glowing embers. The insects were thrown upon the ashes and well mixed with them, and then the whole was stirred with sticks till the wings and legs had broken away and the body was cooked, when

* See also the note at the end of the paper (p. 406).

it generally shrivelled to the size of a grain of wheat. The mass was freed of the ashes by dropping it by degrees into some vessel or on a skin and allowing the wind to sift it; the food was still further cleansed from adhering particles of dust and other unpalatable substances by gently rubbing it between the hands, and rolling it backwards and forwards from one to the other whilst blowing from the mouth. The taste of the roasted bodies of the "Bugongs" is, according to some Europeans who tried them, sweetish and nut-like and rather pleasant eating.*

This unique food supply is restricted to the highest mountains of Australia, but here it can always be found in abundance during the summer months. It is a marvel that the highest and stoniest ridges, on which snow lies for fully five and sometimes six months of the year, with a naturally scanty though rapidly growing summer vegetation, should harbour such enormous numbers of an insect (the caterpillar of which is known to be very voracious) which was at one time the means of fattening a congregation of over 500 aborigines every season.

* After the above was written, I met with Dr. George Bennett's work, "Wanderings of a Naturalist in New South Wales, &c.," wherein the earliest account of this food supply is given. Dr. Bennett set out for "Günundery" (the "Big Bugong" Mountain) from the Upper Tumut, but he did not meet the blacks reported to camp there "Bugonging." His report is consequently from hearsay, and not from personal observation. After describing the cooking of the moths, which corresponds with the method described by me, he continues:—"They are then eaten, or placed in a wooden vessel called a Walbun, or Culibun, and pounded by a piece of wood into masses or cakes resembling lumps of fat, and may be compared in colour and consistence to dough made from smutty wheat mixed with fat. The bodies of the moths are large, and filled with a yellowish oil, resembling in taste a sweet nut. These masses (with which the "Netbuls" or "Talabats" of the native tribes are loaded during the season of feasting upon the "Bugong") will not keep above a week, and seldom even for that time; but by smoking they are able to preserve them for a much longer period. The first time this diet is used by the native tribes, violent vomiting and other debilitating effects are produced; but after a few days they become accustomed to its use, and then thrive and fatten exceedingly upon it." (Vol. i. pp. 271-272.)

The crows fattened rapidly on the moths and were also highly prized as food. They were consequently much pursued by the natives during their bugonging pic-nics.

The fine nets made of kurrajong fibre mentioned above seem to have been especially designed for the purpose of collecting the "Bugong." They had very fine meshes and were manufactured with great care, and being attached to a couple of poles they could be readily folded up when they had to be withdrawn from the crevices. A shrub, (*Pimelia* sp.) growing abundantly in places by the river sides to a height of three to four feet, furnished the fibre. The bark of this bush was stripped and allowed to dry, was then placed in water, and weighted down with some stones for several days till the non-fibrous portions were partly rotted. It was then taken out of the water and spread in the sun to dry till it was quite crisp, after which the fibre was freed by beating with sticks or flat stones. All this was the women's work, and they managed to produce a tenacious material from it that could be spun into the finest threads.*

They kindled fire by friction, and for this purpose procured two pieces of the seed stalk of the grass tree (*Xanthorrhæa*). One of the pieces was flattened and laid on the ground, and the other, pared to a point, was pressed against the flattened surface and rapidly twirled between the flat hands. The friction soon produced sufficient heat to cause some of the fine particles that were loosened by the rotatory motion at the point of contact to glow, which was, with the addition of some powdered charcoal and dry pounded bark fibre, fanned into a flame.

* Among the white people of Australia the name kurrajong is applied to a tree (*Brachychiton*), but the natives in most parts give it a different name and say that kurrajong is white fellow name. It seems to me that the tree obtained its name through a misunderstanding because it yields a fibre that is frequently used by aborigines for making nets. This fibre is called kurrajong by some natives, which seems to have led to the name being applied to the tree. On the other hand, as the Omeo blacks called their bush as well as the fibre kurrajong, such may possibly be the case with the *Brachychiton* tree in some tribal dialects.

To make a signal, a fire was lit by the side of a dry tree and green bushes were heaped upon the flames when these had made a good start. The smoke would then rise alongside of the tree as if it were forced from a furnace.*

Their habitations were simply shelters made of a few sheets of bark put against a pole on the windy side.

Their wearing apparel, for both sexes, consisted of two bundles of narrow strips of skin suspended, one in front and the other behind, from a belt round the waist. During wet and cold weather, however, they wore an opossum cloak or a mat made of kangaroo skins, which otherwise served for carrying the umigong, nulla nulla, boomerangs and hielaman in, when folded.

The belt worn round the middle of the body consisted of a number of closely laid coils of string, made of twisted opossum fur, which was from 12 to 15 feet long. To put it on, they fastened one end to a tree and holding the other end to their body they turned round and round till it was completely wound.

Over the forehead, and very tightly fastened round the head, a band about an inch to an inch and a half wide was generally worn by most of them. This was neatly plaited with fine twists made out of the bark of kurrajong, and esteemed as an adornment.

A woman having her menses would bind a string round both arms, as a sign that she was to be avoided by the men. Should she step across some stream of flowing water whilst in this state, no one would drink below the place where she crossed it. She

*It is often asserted that the natives of Australia communicate by means of smoke. By the manner in which the smoke is made to ascend and by the volume as well as by the number of columns, &c., &c., they are supposed to have formulated a generally understood system of telegraphy. No doubt they are very expert in making smoke ascend, and carefully consider the state of wind and weather, understanding how to choose the proper material (green or dry) and how to take advantage of special local features, and watch the proper time of day when the signals are likely to attract attention. But everything is done in accordance with preconcerted arrangements. No generally acknowledged code exists. In my opinion too much has been made of the supposed elaboration of a telegraphic system by means of smoke signals.

had therefore to be cautious and avoid polluting any water when travelling in company.

When about to give birth the women retired to a secluded place and usually managed the confinement without assistance from other females.

The children generally received a name after something remarkable that happened at the time of their birth or after something in connection with the locality of it.

As a rule the children were a good deal indulged and were allowed to have things their own way, but were supposed to be obedient to their parents. If they disobeyed, they were taught they would be punished during later years by getting bad rashes and sores on their body and limbs, caused through the influence of a fiendish spirit. A disease of this kind was often the cause of death amongst them. It began with an itch like a scab that was dry on the surface but festering below the skin, and at an advanced stage smelled very offensively and sometimes caused the flesh to rot away. Some who were only lightly afflicted with it would perhaps be cured, but when the disease became general and severe it was mostly fatal. As a cure the natives ate a kind of yam* cooked in hot ashes or roasted on stones, as well as other vegetable food and certain herbs.

Whenever a native became ill he imagined that "Jakkandibbi" (the supposed evil spirit) had taken his "gurai" (kidney fat). It was believed by them that they may recover from it, but if Jakkandibbi was to take the gurai the third time it would be followed by death. The blackfellow's belief was that he would live for ever were it not for the evil one who robbed him of his life; even if a spear were thrust through his heart, it would not be the spear that killed him but it would be Jakkandibbi.

* From the description received of the plant, I believe these to be the tubers of a liliaceous plant. The disease, from the description and its cure, seems to be scurvy of a severe nature, or a similar affliction, caused no doubt through unhealthy meat or want of a variety of food.

They believed that an enemy could secretly throw a "gibba" (stone) which would enter the body of the person it was to hurt and cause pain in the place it had entered.*

If therefore anyone felt a pain in the body or any of his limbs the "Karaji" (doctor or wizard) of the tribe would bite or suck the place and generally produce a stone after a few minutes which he professed to have removed from the sore part. Sometimes they even managed to show blood on the stone. As a rule, the patient would soon recover after this display of crafty fraud.

These "Karaji," besides possessing these curative powers, were supposed to be able to work all sorts of miracles and charms, but generally each of them was noted for some special power. Some, for instance, were expert in making rain. For this purpose eagle-hawk feathers were rubbed between the palms of the hands in connection with various manoeuvres and gesticulations, invented and differently performed by each individual conjurer. Every one tried to inspire the onlookers with his special power and used his own methods to deceive the credulous.

The dead were buried in different ways: either in a hollow tree, if the corpse could be dropped down from the top, or in a sitting position in a hole dug in the ground, or a cavity was made at the bottom of a deep hole where the corpse was pushed in and some stone slabs placed against it before the hole was filled up. In each case the body was tied up in some fibrous bark with the knees drawn towards the abdomen and the limbs firmly lashed together. Great wailing and lamenting preceded the burial for several days; the relations, and more particularly the women, chopped and gashed their heads with stone tomahawks till blood flowed freely. When the body was disposed of, they smeared pipeclay over their heads and faces as a sign of mourning. This outward sign of sorrow was retained for some time, but as a rule much longer by the women than by the men. But as soon as the flesh of an enemy was eaten, even if this were on the day

* This superstition is evidently the same as the "pointing of a bone," believed in by most of the Australian indigenes, in another form.

following the burial, all grief was banished and the mourning signs were removed.

They firmly believed that the dead would not stay in the grave but would come to life again in another form, which might take the shape of a fish, bird or animal, or anything else; their ideas were, however, not very clear on this subject. They also believed that the dead would leave the grave sometimes during the night and go hunting. Owing to this belief, no doubt, all personal property was buried with them, as well as other things they might require. The name of the dead was never mentioned by them on any account, and if anyone mentioned it inadvertently they stopped their ears and asked not to be reminded of the dead. If dogs had been owned by the deceased, these were sent to some friendly tribe that their sight might not remind them of the departed. They carefully avoided the graves.*

The Omeo Blacks (as well as the neighbouring tribes) were inveterate cannibals, and at every opportunity would eat the flesh of their enemies, but especially their kidney fat. They would, however, not eat a member of their own tribe.

Their weapons consisted of clubs (*nulla nullas*), boomerangs, shields (*hielaman*), stone tomahawk (*umigong*), and three or four kinds of spears, which were made of reeds, seedstalks of the grass-tree, boxtree, or if procurable, ironbark. The reed and grasstree spears were thrown with the *wommera*, but the heavier and larger wooden spears were thrown with the hand after being well balanced by holding them near the middle. The boomerangs were different also; the larger sort was used for fighting, and a

* Mr. Barry on one occasion noticed two bandicoots near a native grave and told some blacks of it who were camping a short distance from the place. Snow was lying on the ground at the time and the natives were hard pressed for food, but they would not touch the "bandies" because they believed them to be the dogs of the dead. When Mr. Barry shifted some of the boughs that were lying over the grave, under which the animals hid themselves, to convince the natives that they were bandicoots and not dogs, they implored him to desist, adhering to it that the animals were "dog of poor fellow."

smaller sort, which was more curved than the other, they threw at birds. This if thrown against the wind would return to the thrower after making one or two circles in the air. The commonest implement was the yam stick, a plain stout cudgel about four feet long, sharpened and hardened in the fire at one end. It was used for digging out roots and other food from the ground, and in case of need served for defensive purposes.

For carrying water they made a vessel out of bark in the shape of a small canoe. For this purpose they thinned a suitable piece of bark at both ends and placed it in hot ashes to make it soft and pliable, and whilst in this state the ends were folded and tied.

Their canoes were mostly made of bark which was gathered in folds at both ends, after these had been sweated in hot ashes, and fastened together with withes and wooden pins. They chose a convenient crooked tree and stripped the bark from the bent part of it that was already naturally shaped like a canoe. To prevent leaking, a good-sized lump of clay was pressed in at both ends, and if through running on a snag or some other accident, leaks occurred, these were as a rule also stopped with clay. Such canoes did not usually last for a great length of time on account of their fragile nature and the rather rapid decay of the material, but they were more frequently used than those made of wood because they could easily be replaced if destroyed by an enemy. The wooden canoes were made out of a suitable log, and their manufacture demanded a great deal of labour. They had to be entirely worked with stone implements, assisted by lighting a fire inside, which when carefully managed would destroy the bulk of the wood to be removed. Generally they adopted a partly hollow tree for this purpose.

Besides the casual ornamentation of painting, they used to mark their body with tattoo scars. These were produced by means of some sharp stones with which the flesh was incised. To stop the blood and to form the scars they lay down on a heap of fine ashes. Ashes were also applied if at any future time the bleeding should start again. This was all that was used to raise the scars above the surface of the skin. At the age of 17 to 20 years were made

these tattoo scars which were from an inch and a half to two inches long as a rule. It took some time to make the whole series of them, as they allowed those made first to heal before they started others. In this way first the back and then the chest and arms were operated upon in rotation. The women were also tattooed on the chest and arms, but not to such an extent as the men. The marks were supposed to indicate their family descent as well as tribal connection.

Both the men and the women had the septum of the nose pierced to carry a piece of polished kangaroo bone. A woman considered herself looking her best when she had about six or eight inches of bone pushed through her nose. The reason for this habit was that, in addition to its being considered ornamental, when they returned on earth again after death, either as a swan, duck or fish, &c., they would then have a hole ready made for the purpose of breathing.

A FEW NOTES ON THE MONARO TRIBE OF ABORIGINES, WITH A DESCRIPTION OF SOME OF THEIR STONE IMPLEMENTS.

The once numerous tribe inhabiting the Monaro District, comprising the south-western highlands and tablelands of New South Wales, is now almost extinct. The last typical specimen is incarcerated in Goulburn gaol for killing his gin a little more than two years ago, and besides him I believe only another fullblood (young and civilised) native of the tribe exists, who is at present living near Buckley's Crossing. The only one of them I ever saw was "Bonny Jack," the "King" of Monaro, whom I met five years ago. He was a short, rather broad shouldered man with an open countenance and a merry disposition. At the time of our meeting he had not long buried his gin, "Polly,"* and intended to go across the border, if I remember right, with the intention of

* From a correspondent I hear that he "interred" her in a hollow tree by the side of Spring Creek Lake, not far from Berridale. He derived some consolation, or pretended to do so, from the belief that his Polly would "jump up white lady by and by."

trying to get another from a friend who had still two left. He complained bitterly to me that "white fellow" destroyed all the "possum," a grievance, I was later informed, he was constantly harbouring and generally ventilated to new acquaintances. He died recently at Cooma, and with him it may be said the last remnant of the real old stock of manly savages belonging to this tribe disappeared, reaching a good old age and weathering the tempest of vice and demoralisation foisted upon these unhappy people by civilised whites.

I have been told a few stories of individuals who have been illtreated and even murdered by white blackguards, but these isolated instances are nothing compared to what the rum bottle and diseases have accomplished towards wrecking these tribes. Forty years ago they could muster several hundred individuals, although from time immemorial they had been in constant and bloody contentions with most of their neighbours, and to-day, after such a short span of time, owing simply to altered conditions, they have all disappeared but two.

Not far below Jindabyne, where the valley of the Snowy River somewhat narrows between rather rugged hills, used to be in olden times a favourite camping place of the natives who assembled here (even within the knowledge of some settlers) in considerable numbers, mainly for the purpose of making stone implements. A shingle bed near one of the bends in the river furnished excellent and abundant material for tomahawks amongst the flattish and more or less oval pebbles.

Many half finished tomahawks and pebbles, the shaping of which had just been commenced, have from time to time been picked up near this locality, and some may still be found there. The blacks were not likely to encumber themselves with too much weight, and therefore only the finished articles were carried away, the unfinished being left behind to be taken in hand again on the next return to the place.

Plate xxix. represents three such pieces of stone showing the commencement of the work, and one finished tomahawk. The

first three were found by me at the place described, and the last was discovered not far from it near the Crackenback River.

It seems that the first thing in shaping a tomahawk, after selecting a suitable pebble, was simply to beat another stone against it and chip the edges to a slanting face that would produce a sharp angle with one of the planes of the stone. This is all that has been done to the first three specimens represented, the rock of which is a fine grained felspathic quartzite of dark grey colour.

The finished implement is made of a similar material, but somewhat lighter in colour. It is a well finished weapon or tool with a sharp cutting edge and highly polished bevelled sides. The other part of it is dressed smooth by being beaten with another stone. By this method also the indented hollows for fingerholds on the broadest surfaces of it are evidently produced. The implement seems to have been only intended to be held with the hand when it was in use, and is in reality an adze rather than a tomahawk. It weighs twelve ounces.

A NATIVE BURIAL PLACE.

During my visit to the Monaro District in the early part of 1889, I opened a grave near Cobbin (situated between the Snowy River and its tributary the Mowamba River) that was pointed out to me by Mr. Thompson, the owner of the run. To this gentleman I owe the particulars I am about to communicate concerning the individual whose remains I undertook to disturb.

It had been an old man who for several years prior to his death was carried by the tribe from place to place when they shifted their camp, because owing to some hip disease he was unable to walk. The wailing and lamentations over his death lasted for three nights and three days, and a great many natives assembled to assist in the funeral ceremonies. A number of half decayed sticks still lying in a semicircle about twenty yards from the grave marked the place where some brushwood had been heaped up to form a shelter against the wind, and some charcoal indicated the spots where the fires had been lighted during the nights.

The grave was situated in an elevated position on a low rise consisting of coarse gritty and clayey soil. The dry situation and the natural compactness of the soil no doubt greatly helped to preserve the grave, which could be distinguished quite plainly although it was over seventeen years since it had been formed. A circular mound rose about two and a half feet from a base which was upwards of five feet in diameter, irregularly flattened out at the edges and strewn with sparsely imbedded rock fragments. In the centre of the mound there were three posts.

In removing the soil and stones I found that the grave must have been dug over six feet deep in the solid ground, and seemed to have had an oblong shape of about four feet in length by two and a half feet wide. At the bottom a dome-like excavation about three feet long and nearly two feet high had been made in one of the longest sides of the hole, into which the corpse had been pushed. The opening had been covered by bark and grass, against which flat stone slabs had been placed. The hole was filled with granite slabs carefully laid down, with grass in the interstices, for some distance, and over this with stones and earth. At each end of the grave had been placed a strong sapling that rose from the bottom by the side of the cavity in which the body rested to about four feet above the surface of the ground, and a third one was placed midway between them after a few feet had been filled in. These were the posts that rose from the mound, and which guided me to the cavity containing the corpse.

Although the death took place seventeen years before I opened the grave, I found no difficulty in determining the method in which the body had been prepared for interment. The knees had been drawn up to the abdomen and lashed with bast, the elbows had been laid close to the sides, and the hands were placed flat in front of the face. Although nothing but the bones of the man remained, their position left no doubt that the limbs were placed as described. It was evident that the body had been lashed together into the smallest possible compass by bast being coiled round it in all directions. After being tied up it had then been wrapped in a blue blanket, perished fragments of which still

remained, and then in thick fibrous bark that was well lashed round it.

The bones were still very solid, although discoloured. The skull seemed to me of a much lower type than most skulls I have seen, and by no means indicated intellectual power, which might have been expected from the way the individual had been revered by his tribe. The forehead receded very much and was strongly developed over the orbits, and the jaws were extremely powerful, forming a protruding chin that gave the whole face a receding aspect.

Both hip bones were considerably swollen towards the upper margin and showed a distinct honeycombed character which was unmistakably the result of necrosis. From the appearance of these bones it cannot be doubted that the man was unable to walk during the advanced stage of the disease, and he must have suffered a great deal of pain judging from their abnormal condition.

Note.

Unless seen it is scarcely credible what an enormous number of the Bugong moths inhabit the crevices and clefts of the rocks on the highest ridges of the mountains. The crows have become the principal exterminators since the blackfellow has disappeared, and they do their work effectively by entering the narrowest apertures. Thousand of crows may be seen swarming during the whole of the summer about the rocks feeding upon nothing else but the moths. The enormous number of these birds congregated at the highest peaks can only be appreciated by approaching them under cover, as I did in February, 1893, when on a visit to the Australian Alps, and surprising them in their secret pursuit on one of the rugged peaks. As soon as I was observed by one of them, a caw of alarm was raised, which was rapidly repeated by others, and from every crack and cranny their black plumage burst forth. Soon thousands of crows rose in the air almost like a cloud, making the environs resound again

with their mingled caws of terror and surprise. On land I have never seen such a number of birds rise together as I saw at Mt. Tate; it could only be compared to the incalculable number of sea-fowl that rise when they are disturbed at their lonely rock-isle by a sudden shot from a passing vessel.

It is almost impossible to form an estimate of the number of the insects that are annually devoured by the crows; just as difficult as it is to form an idea of the masses formerly consumed by the blacks. The figure in each case must, however, reach high into the millions. Like the dusky coloured men, the birds are fonder of this food than anything else, and will not touch even dead or dying sheep, I am informed, whilst plenty of "Bugongs" are to be found. My own observations confirm this statement.

The Dingo, as well as the Native Cat, it is stated, feed upon the moths.

Dr. R. von Lendenfeld (Report on the Gold Fields of Victoria, 1886, p. 72), speaking of the Bogong Range, states:—"The high tablelands which constitute the nucleus of this range are inhabited by a species of moth belonging to the *Noctuina*. The caterpillars of it are exceedingly abundant, and formed, half-roasted, at certain seasons, a favourite food of the Australian natives. The natives call these caterpillars 'Bogong,' which name was afterwards applied to the habitat of the Bogong," &c.

The statement as to the caterpillars having been eaten is incorrect. The larvæ of *Agrotis spina*, Gn., like the imago, are shy of light. They are night feeders, and hide during the day, like all other species of the genus, in the ground or at the base of plants, and besides are protected by their colour. Their habits, as well as their protective colour, prohibits a collection in numbers sufficient to serve as food for whole tribes of natives.

The accompanying sketches I owe to the skill of my young friend, Mr. Claude Fuller, whose valuable assistance was readily given and is deserving of my warmest thanks.

EXPLANATION OF PLATES.

PLATE XXIX.

Figs. 1-3.—Flat stones chipped at the margins, showing the first preparation for the production of a sharp edge.

Fig. 4.—Finished tomahawk, or adze; the asterisks indicate the position of the circular depressions or fingerholds ($\frac{2}{3}$ nat. size).

PLATE XXX.

Grave of an Aboriginal; with sections of the same, showing the body as placed in the cavity, and the manner in which the hole was filled.